

**PACKSADDLE
ALLOTMENT
MANAGEMENT
PLAN/AGREEMENT**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
OR-025-02-048**

**Three Rivers Resource Area
Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, Oregon 97738**

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PACKSADDLE ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN/AGREEMENT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Packsaddle Allotment #7012 is located 30.00 miles northwest of Burns, Oregon (Map #1). It is currently divided into four pastures of unequal size and with differing resource concerns. The distribution of available Animal Unit Months (AUMs) of forage in each pasture also varies considerably which complicates the development of a multiyear grazing system that meets all resource concerns.

In 2004, monitoring data collected on the Packsaddle Allotment over the past 10 years were analyzed through a formal interdisciplinary evaluation process. The evaluation analyzed whether or not management actions in place were causing resource objectives to be met. The evaluation also included an analysis of the allotment to determine if current management was in conformance with the Oregon and Washington Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

The results of the evaluation describe how riparian; water quality; and native, Threatened and Endangered, and locally important species standards are not being achieved in Mineral Creek while they are being met in Wickiup Creek. It also concludes that livestock are not a significant factor for nonachievement of the standards in Mineral Creek. The standards for uplands and ecological processes were met across the allotment.

A. Historical Information

In 1965, following a wildfire, the Packsaddle seeding was created. The area was planted to crested wheatgrass to stabilize the fragile soils shortly after the burn. Following the seeding project the area was fenced to protect the seeding investment and to ensure the establishment of seeded grass in the project area. This fence created a pasture which has been managed separately because of considerations for the differing vegetation. Today, the seeded area has completely recovered and once again supports a healthy native bunchgrass community. After 39 years there is a need to remove the Packsaddle seeding fence and consolidate the Packsaddle Seeding Pasture with other pastures within the Packsaddle Allotment.

Also, a riparian management fence was constructed in 1977 on the east and west sides of Wickiup and Mineral Creeks which created the Wickiup Pasture (a riparian management pasture) in the canyon. These fences have several areas of concern which are related to the current design of the fence. On the northeast side of the Wickiup Pasture, the pasture fence drops sharply downhill toward the creek, creating a bottleneck area at the bottom of the canyon where it meets the Forest boundary fence. This design flaw has created an area where the fence receives very heavy pressure while cattle are authorized to graze in the East Pasture. Once cattle access this bottleneck area, the fence usually is broken down and livestock enter the Wickiup Pasture resulting in the removal of riparian and meadow vegetation during periods when such removal is detrimental. This section of fence (approximately 0.25-mile) should be moved to the top of the ridge to the east of the present location, eliminating the bottleneck area. A second area of concern is a water gap which drops into Wickiup Creek from the West Pasture. Even though this water gap is well constructed, it draws cattle into the canyon bottom where they tend to congregate and overutilize the vegetation as well as mechanically break down the streambanks. Because of the small size of the West Pasture, this water gap is not needed and fences into the canyon should be eliminated entirely. Construction of approximately 0.25-mile of new fence on the west ridge above the canyon would be necessary to completely close off Wickiup Creek from livestock authorized to graze in the West Pasture once the water gap is removed.

The current northern allotment boundary fences 640 acres of Ochoco National Forest Service land into the allotment. This section of land was State owned land prior to a State land exchange with the Forest Service in the 1980's. The fences around this section of land have deteriorated to a point in which the entire boundary (3.00 miles) needs replacement. To reduce costs of replacement, we are proposing to fence the property boundary between Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered land (1.00-mile). The existing fence, which is on Forest Service land, should be abandoned and removed.

The allotment boundary fence between the Forest and public land on the east side of the Packsaddle Allotment is also very old and in need of reconstruction. The affected portion of fence is approximately 1.25 miles in length. Most of this fence has to be propped up annually when livestock are in the East Pasture of the Packsaddle Allotment. Quite often the fence is not maintained when livestock are on the Forest. This portion of fence, being in poor repair, contributes to some unauthorized livestock use in the area. The BLM is proposing the reconstruction of this portion of fence.

A land exchange which was completed in the early 1990's allows for the addition of land acreage into the Packsaddle Allotment. The addition of this acreage (approximately 275 acres) would result in only minor changes to the present pastures and grazing system.

No new forage allocations would occur if this additional acreage is added to the allotment. Additional land in the Wickiup Creek Canyon would be added to the Wickiup Pasture. Following the addition of this land to the pasture, the Wickiup Pasture would be rested for a minimum of 5 years to improve riparian and meadow conditions. After that time the pasture would only be used by livestock when it is determined that resource objectives can be met. The present southern allotment boundary fence would be removed, eliminating the associated maintenance problem with the creek crossing in the canyon and a new fence would be constructed on the east ridgeline of the canyon running south to private property and the new allotment boundary. The remaining land acquired through the land exchange would be added to the East Pasture, which is managed for upland resource values.

Several springs are located in the acquired property to the south of the existing allotment boundary. These springs should be developed and fenced within an enclosure to protect the riparian areas associated with them from livestock trampling while providing for offsite water.

The source of Packsaddle Spring, which lies in the bottom of an ephemeral stream channel, is currently unprotected from livestock impacts. This spring runs enough water to flow down the channel for nearly 0.25-mile. The BLM is proposing to fence the spring source with a small enclosure and allow livestock to access the water downstream.

B. Need

The need for these proposed projects and management changes is to improve livestock management within the Packsaddle Allotment by accommodating livestock movement in the East and West Pastures away from the riparian areas along Wickiup and Mineral Creeks. Repair of the existing fences where appropriate would allow for increased compliance with authorized livestock grazing schedules for the allotment and adjoining areas. Further, the removal of the Packsaddle Seeding Pasture fence would better distribute livestock in the East Pasture while improving the management of vegetation in which was once a crested wheatgrass seeding.

As the situation stands now, it is not possible to continue to make progress toward the riparian, redband trout, and Malheur mottled sculpin objectives for the allotment. Resource conditions in this area have highlighted the need to address the current situation. Though only 1.50 miles of public riparian habitat is being impacted in the Wickiup Pasture, its relative significance is substantial in light of recreational use in the area and total miles of publicly owned riparian habitat on Wickiup and Mineral Creeks.

C. Purpose

The purpose of the proposed activity is to adjust the grazing use in the Packsaddle Allotment to meet the land use plan objectives of the Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (RMP) found in Appendix 9, Page 128, and the objectives developed in the Packsaddle Allotment evaluation. The objectives developed in the allotment evaluation process are:

1. “Maintain the current static trend in vegetation composition and cover to continue to provide habitat and forage for big game and livestock over the next 6 years.”
2. “Continue an upward trend in the riparian area conditions along 1.25 miles of Wickiup Creek and 0.60-mile of Mineral Creek over the next evaluation period.”

Management would be improved in the Wickiup Pasture which in turn would improve riparian and meadow conditions by realigning portions of the pasture management fences. The realignment would be configured to provide for livestock movement away from the impacted riparian area and to reduce fence maintenance requirements. Reconstruction of the allotment boundary fences would decrease or eliminate unauthorized livestock use in the allotment.

Development and fencing of springs in the allotment would move impacts associated with livestock away from the spring sources and associated meadow areas.

D. Goals and Objectives of the Proposed Activity

The goal of the proposed activity is to move livestock use and associated impacts away from the identified riparian area along Wickiup and Mineral Creeks, and to allow for continued improvement of the riparian area, water quality, and aquatic habitat. A secondary goal is to improve livestock management within the allotment through management changes, fence construction, fence reconstruction, fence realignments and removal while at the same time incorporating acquired lands into the allotment.

E. Compliance with Land Use Plans, Laws, Regulations and Policy

This project is in conformance with objectives and land use allocations in the 1992 Three Rivers RMP and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and with the objectives stated in the August 12, 1997 Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management for Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the States of Oregon and Washington. This project is also consistent with the Endangered Species Act Section 2(c) and 7(a)1.

CHAPTER II: DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action - Packsaddle Fence Realignment, Project Development and Management Changes

The proposed action alternative incorporates livestock management changes, project development, project maintenance and reconstruction, project modification, incorporates additional acreage into the allotment and removes acreage from the Packsaddle Allotment (Map #2).

The proposed action is to implement the following grazing management actions that would address the resource concerns identified in the Packsaddle Allotment evaluation.

1. Adjust the season of use in the allotment from April 1 to June 15 to May 1 to June 15.
2. Schedule the rotation of pastures on a 2-year cycle as follows:

Even Years

East Pasture	05/01-06/15	250 AUMs
West Pasture	Rest	0 AUMs
Wickiup Pasture	Rest	0 AUMs

Odd Years

East Pasture	Rest	0 AUMs
West Pasture	05/01-06/15	100 AUMs
Wickiup Pasture*	05/01-05/15	To Be Determined

* - The Wickiup Pasture would be rested for 5 years and then grazed when it is determined that resource objectives can be met. The stocking level would be conservative and determined through rangeland monitoring.

This grazing system would be a rest-rotation type of system which provides for resource concerns in the allotment. The Wickiup Pasture would be rested for the first 5 years of the plan and then would be used with the West Pasture when it is determined that resource concerns can be met in the pasture. The East and West Pastures would be grazed every other year on a rotation basis to provide for rest in one pasture while the other is grazed.

Small enclosure fences consisting of no more than 1-acre would be constructed around several existing spring sources to protect them from future livestock impacts. Prior to construction of the fences at Packsaddle Spring #1, a spring box would be placed at one or more spring sources and water would be piped several hundred feet to an offsite trough. Construction would be done by backhoe to place the spring box, collection pipes and bury the pipe which runs to the offsite trough. The Packsaddle Spring would fence approximately .2-acre to protect the spring source but, would not be further developed. Livestock would still have access to the water in the channel below the spring enclosure fence.

All new and reconstructed fences described as part of the proposed action would be built to BLM standard specifications for a 4-wire steel fence. The top three strands would be barbed wire and the bottom strand smooth wire. Rock cribs would be constructed at corners, on each side of any gates and to create stretch panels and end braces.

Fence construction on public land would be by hand with the clearing of vegetation from the line with hand tools and chain saws which would require only a minimum disturbance of soil and vegetation. Steel posts would be solid green and pounded into the ground, each typically creating a small hole 1 to ½ inches in diameter. No vegetation would be cleared using heavy equipment along the line or soil otherwise disturbed. All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) or 4-wheel drive vehicle use during fence construction would be restricted to that required to distribute materials and construct the fence.

For all existing fence to be removed, the wire would be taken off the posts and rolled up, and posts would be extracted from the ground. Existing rock cribs would be dismantled and the rocks dispersed. Removal of fenceposts would leave a hole approximately 12 inches deep in the soil, which would quickly disappear as a result of natural soil processes. No other vegetation would be cleared or soil otherwise disturbed. Material would be removed from the area by hand or ATV and then by vehicle from the nearest vehicle two-track road. ATV use during fence removal would be restricted to that required to collect and remove materials.

Special Status plant species surveys would be completed on all sites prior to any construction or removal of fence or any other development. Adverse effects to these values would be mitigated primarily through project realignment or relocation.

Appropriate archaeological surveys would be conducted as deemed necessary by the District archaeologist. When archaeological surveys are conducted and during the time of actual fence construction, if archaeological sites are found, any proposed project would be rerouted or relocated to mitigate construction, removal, and post-construction impacts.

B. Alternative A - Fence Realignment Only

This alternative is the same as the Proposed Action alternative only without any management plan development or spring development.

The Packsaddle fence realignment would move the existing Wickiup Pasture fence which separates the East and West Pastures from the Wickiup Pasture. All construction and removal activities would occur within T. 21 S., R. 26 E., Willamette Meridian. The realignment would result in construction of approximately 1.00-mile of new fence, and removal of approximately 1.00-mile of existing fence, all on public land (Map 3).

The proposed new fence route would be on the ridgetops of Wickiup Canyon directly above the removed portions of fence and south of the existing allotment boundary through the acquired land to the new allotment boundary. Fence identified to be removed entirely would consist of approximately 2.00 miles and currently encloses the Packsaddle seeding excluding the allotment boundary portion of the fence.

All fence construction described would be built to BLM standard specifications for a 4-wire steel fence approximately 42 inches high with 20-foot post spacing. The top three strands would be barbed wire and the bottom smooth wire. Rock cribs would be constructed at corners and on each side of any gates and to create stretch panels and end braces.

Fence construction on public land would be by hand and would require only a minimum disturbance of soil and vegetation. Steel posts would be solid green or grey and pounded into the ground, each typically creating a hole 12 inches in diameter. A minimum amount of vegetation would be cleared to facilitate fence construction. No soil disturbance other than that necessary to facilitate fence construction along the fence line would occur. ATV or 4-wheel drive vehicle use during fence construction would be restricted to that required to distribute materials and construct the fence.

For all existing fence to be removed, the wire would be taken off the posts and rolled up, and posts will be extracted from the ground. Existing rock cribs would be dismantled and the rocks dispersed. Removal of fenceposts would leave a hole approximately 12 inches in the soil, which would quickly disappear as a result of natural soil processes. No vegetation would be cleared or soil otherwise disturbed. Material would be removed from the area by hand and then by vehicle from the nearest vehicle two-track road. ATV and vehicle use during fence removal would be restricted to that required to collect and remove materials.

Special Status plant species surveys would be completed on all sites prior to any construction or removal of fence. Adverse effects to these values would be mitigated primarily through fence realignment.

Appropriate archaeological surveys would be conducted as deemed necessary by the District archaeologist. When archaeological surveys are conducted and during the time of actual fence construction, if archaeological sites are found, any proposed fence would be rerouted to mitigate construction, removal, and post-construction impacts.

C. Alternative B - No Action

No new fences or fence removal, projects or management changes are proposed under this alternative (Map #4). Current livestock management techniques would continue to be employed to meet the identified goals and objectives currently identified for the allotment. The small Packsaddle Seeding Pasture would remain and livestock impacts would continue to be concentrated onto the small areas within the water gap and bottleneck areas in Wickiup Creek Canyon. None of the acquired land would be incorporated into the allotment and the section of Ochoco Forest land would remain fenced into the Packsaddle Allotment.

CHAPTER III: AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements

The following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed in the Three Rivers RMP/EIS, are not known to be present, or would not be known to be affected by the proposed action or alternatives and will not be discussed further in this Environmental Assessment (EA): Prime or Unique Farmlands, Floodplains, Hazardous Materials, Noxious Weeds, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Special Status Species Flora, Air Quality, American Indian Religious Concerns, Paleontology, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness Study Areas or Wilderness Areas.

The following critical elements of the human environment are present in the project area:

Water Quality: Water Quality has been monitored by collecting water temperature data in the Packsaddle Allotment from 1997 through 2004. One temperature probe was placed in the upper reaches of Wickiup Creek beginning in 1997. This probe was removed that same year and has since been used to monitor water temperature annually from 2000 to the present. In 2003, a second probe was placed at the lower reaches of Wickiup Creek. This probe has now been used for 2 years. These waters have exceeded the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality standard of 68 degrees Fahrenheit for salmonid bearing streams. Although the standard is not being met, the preliminary data indicates that the water temperature has dropped as much as 12 degrees Fahrenheit as the creek flowed through the allotment, a distance of 2.00 miles.

Special Status Fauna: Although there have been no known sightings of greater sage-grouse within the allotment, a small portion of the allotment is considered to be suitable habitat for them. Malheur mottled sculpin (a Bureau Sensitive Species) and Redband trout (a Bureau Tracking Species) reside in Wickiup Creek.

Wetlands and Riparian Zones: Riparian zones are associated with Wickiup Creek, Mineral Creek, and Packsaddle Springs. These riparian zones are managed for riparian characteristics and objectives. Grazing is authorized along Wickiup Creek, Mineral Creek, and Packsaddle Springs early enough in the spring to allow for total regrowth of riparian vegetation and is also done with limits to utilization of both herbaceous and deciduous woody plant species. Livestock use associated with Packsaddle Springs occurs early enough for total regrowth when the East Pasture is used as well as on an every other year schedule.

1. Healthy Rangelands Resources

The following resource descriptions relate to the standards for rangeland health identified in the document "Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the States of Oregon and Washington" (August 12, 1997).

a. Watershed Function - Uplands (Standard 1)

“Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates, moisture storage, and stability that are appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.”

Vegetation throughout the East and West Pastures is dominated by ponderosa pine and western juniper woodlands with intermingled mountain big sagebrush and low sagebrush communities. Associated species are green rabbitbrush, snowberry, Sandberg’s bluegrass, Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, lupines, and various forbs. Aspen communities are scattered along Wickiup Creek and its tributaries. None of these communities have been identified as being infested with any noxious weeds.

Fences are constructed to control the timing, duration, and frequency of grazing and to provide for periodic rest to achieve improvement in the rangeland condition in the area.

b. Watershed Function - Riparian/Wetland Areas (Standard 2)

“Riparian-wetland areas are in properly functioning physical condition appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.”

Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) assessments were conducted on Wickiup and Mineral Creeks during the 1998 grazing season.

Assessments show that Mineral Creek is nonfunctional and Wickiup Creek is in PFC. Mineral Creek is functioning at-risk. Functional-at-risk conditions are generally in low to moderate gradient areas that are more easily accessible to most grazing animals. All reaches within the project area are making progress toward PFC.

c. Ecological Processes (Standard 3)

“Healthy, productive, and diverse plant and animal populations and communities appropriate to soil, climate, and landform are supported by ecological processes of nutrient cycling, energy flow, and the hydrologic cycle.”

The assumption is made that adequate ecological processes (hydrologic, nutrient, and energy cycling) are occurring if the uplands are in good or excellent condition, riparian systems are properly functioning, water quality meets standards, and the appropriate native species diversity is present. Based on these criteria, the allotment is an area where progress is being made toward achieving adequate ecological processes that are appropriate to the soil, climate, and landform of the area.

d. Water Quality (Standard 4)

“Surface water and groundwater quality, influenced by agency actions, complies with State water quality standards.”

The beneficial uses in the Wickiup Pasture of the Packsaddle Allotment are fish habitat and water quality. Temperature is a water quality parameter of concern for these beneficial uses. Logging activities in the past are still influencing the streams in this allotment. Currently, impacts to perennial streams in the allotment are primarily due to unauthorized livestock use resulting from the condition and design of the fences in the allotment. Wickiup Creek is listed as water quality limited under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act because of water temperatures that exceed the Oregon water quality standard. The main cause of the 303(d) listing for the stream is most likely the condition of the upstream riparian areas since water enters the allotment above the standard and then drops as it flows through the allotment.

e. Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species (Standard 5)

“Habitats support healthy, productive, and diverse populations and communities of native plants and animals (including Special Status species and species of local importance) appropriate to soil, climate, and landform.”

(1) Fisheries

The redband trout and mottled sculpin are present in Mineral and Wickiup Creeks within the proposed project area. These fish species are most likely to be positively affected by the proposed activity.

Most of the current suitable habitat occurs within the upper and lower elevation reaches of Wickiup Creek within the Wickiup Pasture, where water remains in the stream channel throughout the year. Fish habitat in Wickiup Creek is actually pretty close to desirable levels according to an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Aquatic Habitat Survey. A quarter mile section of the stream dries up or goes underground during the summer months and does not support suitable fish habitat throughout most the year. Human use of the area is limited by the difficulty of access. Mineral Creek does have several reaches of the stream that are impacted by higher than optimum water temperatures, occurrence of fine sediments in the substrates, inadequate riparian vegetation to stabilize streambanks, and low frequency of pool habitats. Improvement of the habitat has been occurring over the past several years in both creeks.

(2) Wildlife

Migratory northern bald eagles (Federal Threatened) pass over the area. Golden eagles, red-tailed hawks, Swainson's hawk, American kestrels, great horned owls, and other raptors are common to the area and may nest in some areas within the allotment. Western bluebirds known to be present within the allotment

Greater sage-grouse (a Federal Candidate species) habitat is found in a portion of the allotment during the summer months. This area is too high in elevation for strutting grounds or wintering areas.

Additional native or locally important species include big game species and upland game birds. Elk, mule deer, and pronghorn antelope summer in the allotment and winter in the lower elevation areas outside the allotment. Preble's shrew can be found within the allotment. Upland game birds in the area include mourning dove during spring and summer, and California quail near brushy drainages yearlong.

It is estimated that riparian areas provide habitat for over 150 nongame species and are important migratory paths for neotropical birds. Beaver have been present in these streams and provide instream structure through construction of dams which collect sediment and raise the local water table, thereby increasing the longevity of downstream flows. These dams may also cause channel degradation when they are abandoned by the beaver and break as a result of no maintenance. Portions of the riparian habitat have areas that have been cleared by beaver. Uplands provide habitat for a wide variety of native species found in the area.

2. Other Resources

a. Domestic Livestock Management

Grazing management for the allotment provides for short duration spring use in the Wickiup Pasture and every other year spring use in the East and West Pastures. The current permittee supports rest of the Wickiup Pasture to restore riparian condition.

The current grazing permit provides for 250 AUMs of forage for livestock, licensed at 100 percent public land. The active permitted use for the allotment is seldom reached by the current permittee.

b. Cultural Resources

There are no known prehistoric archaeological sites located within the project area.

Much of the project area has not been surveyed for archaeological sites and some may occur in areas conducive to settlement.

No known paleontological resources occur within the proposed project activity area. No American Indian religious sites or use areas are known to occur within the proposed activity area.

c. Recreation

Hunting and fishing are the most common forms of recreation activities that occur within the project area.

The following critical elements have been recently established and were not addressed in the Three Rivers RMP/EIS:

Migratory Birds: Some migratory birds are known to use the project area for nesting, foraging, and resting as they pass through on their yearly migrations.

Environmental Justice: There are no economically disadvantaged or minority populations present within the project area.

Adverse Energy Impacts: There is no known potential for energy resource development within the project area.

CHAPTER IV: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The proposed action and alternatives would have no known effect on air quality, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, prime or unique farmlands, floodplains other than those addressed as streamside riparian areas, American Indian religious concerns, Federal Threatened or Endangered species, wild and free-roaming horses, hazardous materials management, or economically disadvantaged groups (Executive Order 12898).

A. Proposed Action

1. Healthy Rangeland Resources

a. Watershed Function - Uplands (Standard 1)

Under the proposed action, some upland vegetation currently included in the East and West Pastures and the acquired lands, would be realigned into the Wickiup Pasture. Consequently, this area would be subject to the shorter season of use employed in the Wickiup Pasture. Also, removal of the Packsaddle Seeding Pasture fence and addition of the remaining acquired lands would add approximately 422 acres to the East Pasture. These shifts would not result in any negative effects on the upland vegetation resources, given the current season of use, scheduled rest in each pasture, utilization patterns and livestock distribution within the Wickiup, East and West Pastures.

Improvement in upland condition has been occurring, and would continue to occur under the proposed action.

b. Watershed Function - Riparian/Wetland Areas (Standard 2)

The proposed fence realignment would alleviate concentrated livestock pressure in the water gap and bottleneck areas associated with fences in the Wickiup Pasture. Also, an additional 0.50-mile of riparian area along Wickiup Creek would be added to the Wickiup Pasture and would be managed for its riparian attributes. Continued progress would be made toward riparian improvement and allotment objectives along Wickiup and Mineral Creeks.

c. Ecological Processes (Standard 3)

On public land, under the proposed action, the upland condition, riparian condition, water quality, wildlife habitat, and fish habitat would improve due to improved livestock management throughout the allotment.

Ecological processes have been improving from recent management and would continue to improve at an accelerated rate under the proposed action.

d. Water Quality (Standard 4)

With better capability to manage livestock, improved riparian vegetation condition and bank stability are expected. These conditions would, in turn, allow improvement in water quality in the Wickiup Pasture along Mineral and Wickiup Creeks. Water quality would be expected to improve as banks become stabilized with vegetation, siltation and turbidity decrease, and lower width to depth ratios develop in the area of current concentrated livestock impacts.

Water quality enhancement has already been occurring. The effect on water quality would be accelerated improvement, as described above for upland and riparian areas.

e. Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species (Standard 5)

(1) Fisheries

The proposed fence realignment would allow better management of livestock grazing which would result in improvements in fish habitat. Riparian vegetation condition and bank stability would be expected to improve. Enhanced fish habitat characteristics would include more shading of the stream, root wad and root mass cover, overhanging vegetation cover, and reductions in silt in spawning gravel.

Fish habitat recovery has already been occurring. The effect on

fish habitat would be continued improvement of habitat, as described above, for riparian and water quality.

(2) Wildlife

No negative effects on northern bald eagles or other raptor species would be expected under this alternative.

Livestock forage utilization levels and scheduled rest in pastures would leave adequate herbaceous cover on the uplands for Greater sage-grouse. Fencing of spring sources is expected to benefit sage-grouse through improved cover and diversity of foraging areas within the Wickiup Pasture and the spring enclosures. The 3.20 miles of new fence would be a slight hazard to sage-grouse, which may collide with new fences, causing mortality (Call and Maser, 1985). Removal of equivalent amounts of fence in the same area would help offset this collision hazard.

The additional livestock control resulting from fence realignment would allow for improved riparian habitat along 1.50 miles of public stream, with increases in desirable rushes, sedges, and riparian woody species. The increased cover would benefit the Preble's shrew.

No effect on western bluebird would be expected from the new fence. The new fence may be a slight collision hazard to mule deer, but with removal of an equivalent amount of existing fence in the same activity area, no net increase in this hazard is expected. Additionally, fence design criteria would be implemented to mitigate the collision hazard effects. The new fence would have little impact on antelope, because they would pass under the fence.

For other species of wildlife, riparian improvement would result in increased wildlife use and species richness. Many songbirds and small mammals would be favored by increased willow and aspen cover and increased ground cover.

The effect on wildlife habitat would be the continued improvements to the upland and riparian vegetative communities and associated habitats from changes in livestock grazing management. These changes would result in improvements to the wildlife habitat of the Wickiup Creek area.

(3) Plants

No Special Status plant communities are known to exist in the Packsaddle Allotment.

2. Other Resources

a. Domestic Livestock Management

Effects of the proposed action would be improved livestock distribution and utilization patterns on both riparian and upland vegetation. Fence realignments and construction would improve management of upland vegetation in all upland pastures and riparian vegetation in the Wickiup Pasture. Delaying grazing for an additional 2 weeks, over the current situation, would allow the plants to complete a longer portion of their growth cycle prior to being grazed which would reduce the overall impact of being grazed.

b. Cultural Resources

It is expected that realignment and removal of fencing, as proposed, would result in no known impacts to archaeological resources within the proposed project activity area. Proposed spring development and fence sites would receive appropriate archaeological surveys prior to any work being done. If, during completion of the archaeological survey or during the time of actual construction, any highly significant archaeological sites are found, the proposed project would be rerouted or relocated to mitigate construction and post-construction impacts. Results of the archaeological survey would be located in Burns BLM files, with a copy forwarded to the State Historic Preservation Office for their information.

Positive effects would be the addition to the information base and protection of additional cultural sites, if found. No negative effects to cultural resources are expected.

3. Socioeconomic Effects

The permittee would have a more stable livestock operation from which to generate income from public land under this alternative. The local economy would have short-term benefits from the jobs created as a result of implementing projects associated with this alternative.

4. Cumulative Effects

Under the proposed action alternative there would be a net decrease in the amount of fencing within the project and adjacent areas. Highly visible wooden fences would be replaced with less visible steel posts at reconstruction sites. Impacts to the natural springs at the southern edge of the allotment would be removed following development. Overall there would be a positive effect to the ecological condition of the area as a result of the implementation of these actions.

B. Alternative A - Fence Realignment Only

1. Healthy Rangeland Resources

a. Watershed Function - Uplands (Standard 1)

Under this alternative, some upland vegetation, currently included in the East and West Pastures, would be realigned into the Wickiup Pasture. Consequently, this area would be subject to the shorter and more restricted season of use. Also, removal of the Packsaddle Seeding Pasture fence and addition of the remaining acquired lands would add approximately 422 acres to the East Pasture. These shifts would not result in any negative impacts to the upland vegetation resource, given the current utilization patterns and livestock distribution within the Wickiup, East and West Pastures.

Improvement in upland condition has been occurring, and would continue to occur under the proposed action.

b. Watershed Function - Riparian/Wetland Areas (Standard 2)

The proposed fence realignment would alleviate concentrated livestock pressure in the water gap and bottleneck areas associated with the Wickiup Pasture. Also, an additional 0.50-mile of riparian area along Wickiup Creek would be added to the Wickiup Pasture and would be managed for its riparian attributes. Continued progress would be made toward riparian objectives along Wickiup and Mineral Creeks.

Riparian and meadow areas associated with the spring sources would be protected with fencing but, water from the springs on the southern edge of the allotment would no longer be available to livestock. Meadow areas associated with spring sources would improve under exclusion.

c. Ecological Processes (Standard 3)

On public land, under the fences only alternative, the upland condition, riparian condition, water quality, wildlife habitat, and fish habitat would improve due to improved livestock management throughout the allotment.

Ecological processes have been improving from past management and would continue to improve at an accelerated rate under the proposed action.

d. Water Quality (Standard 4)

With better capability to manage livestock, improved riparian vegetation condition and bank stability are expected in the Wickiup Creek Pasture. These conditions would, in turn, allow improvement in water quality along Mineral and Wickiup Creeks. Water quality would be expected to improve as banks become stabilized by vegetation, siltation and turbidity decrease, and lower width to depth ratios develop in the area of current concentrated livestock impacts.

Water quality enhancement has already been occurring. The effect on water quality would be continued improvement, as described above for upland and riparian areas.

e. Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species (Standard 5)

(1) Fisheries

The proposed fence realignment would allow better management of livestock grazing which would result in improvements in fish habitat. Riparian vegetation condition and bank stability would be expected to improve. Enhanced fish habitat characteristics would include improved shading of the stream, root wad and root mass cover, overhanging vegetation cover, and reductions in silt in spawning gravel.

Fish habitat recovery has already been occurring. The effect on fish habitat would be continued improvement of habitat, as described above, for riparian and water quality.

(2) Wildlife

No impacts on northern bald eagles or other raptor species would be expected under this alternative.

Livestock forage utilization levels and scheduled rest in the

pastures would leave adequate herbaceous cover on uplands for western sage-grouse. Fencing spring sources and the associated meadows is expected to benefit sage-grouse through improved cover and diversity of foraging areas. The 3.20 miles of new fence would be a slight hazard to sage-grouse, which may collide with new fences, causing mortality (Call and Maser, 1985). Removal of equivalent amounts of fence in the same area would help offset this collision hazard.

The livestock control resulting from the fence realignment would allow improved riparian habitat along the 1.50 miles of public stream, with increases in desirable rushes, sedges, and riparian woody species. The increase in cover would benefit the Preble's shrew.

No effect on western bluebird would be expected from the new fence. The new fence may be a slight collision hazard to mule deer, but with removal of an equivalent amount of existing fence in the same activity area, no net increase in this hazard is expected. Additionally, fence design criteria would be implemented to mitigate the collision hazard effects. The new fence would have little impact on antelope, because they would pass under the fence.

For other species of wildlife, riparian improvement would result in increased wildlife use and species richness. Many songbirds and small mammals would be favored by increased alder, willow, and aspen cover and increased ground cover.

The effect on wildlife habitat would be the continued improvement to the upland and riparian vegetative communities and associated habitats from changes in livestock grazing management. These changes would result in improvements to the wildlife habitat of the Wickiup Creek area.

(3) Plants

No Special Status plant communities are known to exist in the Packsaddle Allotment.

2. Other Resources

a. Domestic Livestock Management

Effects of this alternative would be improved livestock distribution and utilization patterns of both riparian and upland vegetation.

b. Cultural Resources

It is expected that realignment and removal of fencing under the fencing only alternative would result in no effects on archaeological resources within the proposed project activity area. Project sites would receive appropriate archaeological surveys prior to any work being done. If, during completion of the archaeological survey or during the time of actual fence construction or removal, any highly significant archaeological sites are found, the proposed project would be rerouted or relocated to mitigate construction and post-construction impacts. Results of archaeological surveys would be located in Burns BLM files, with a copy forwarded to the State Historic Preservation Office for their information.

Positive effects would be the addition to the information base and protection of additional cultural sites, if found. No negative effects would be expected.

3. Socioeconomic Effects

The permittee would have a more stable livestock operation from which to generate income from public land under this alternative. The local economy would have short-term benefits from the jobs created as a result of implementing projects associated with this alternative.

4. Cumulative Effects

Under this alternative there would be a positive effect on the project area associated with a net reduction of fencing. The reconstruction of the existing fence on the east side of the allotment with steel posts would reduce the visual effect associated with the wooden fence which is currently in place.

C. Alternative B - No Action

1. Healthy Rangeland Resources

a. Watershed Function - Upland (Standard 1)

Effects on uplands would be unchanged under this alternative. Upland areas would continue to improve in the Wickiup Pasture, however, the water gap areas will continue to receive heavy grazing pressure and associated effects while livestock are authorized in the allotment and possibly in the adjoining areas.

No addition of acreage would occur within the allotment. Current livestock distribution and utilization would remain the same. The Packsaddle Seeding Pasture would remain fenced which is unnecessary now that the seeding has reverted back to the native grasses.

b. Watershed Function - Riparian/Wetland Areas (Standard 2)

Concentrated livestock effects to public riparian resources on Mineral Creek and Wickiup Creek would be expected to continue under this alternative. No realignment of fences would occur in the project area. Livestock would continue to concentrate in the water gap areas along Wickiup Creek and the area in the northeast corner of the Wickiup Pasture would continue to be a problem area where the fence can be broken down allowing livestock trespass onto the meadows in the area. The overall effect would be little or no progress made toward riparian objectives in the affected area.

c. Ecological Processes (Standard 3)

Potential recovery of the ecological processes dependent upon riparian management and water quality would continue to be slow on Wickiup and Mineral Creeks because of continued livestock impacts in riparian areas.

Upland ecological processes have been improving from past management and would continue to improve at the same rate under this alternative.

d. Water Quality (Standard 4)

Improvement would occur throughout the allotment as described under the proposed action, but would occur more slowly due to the continued livestock impacts within the water gap and other problem areas near Wickiup and Mineral Creeks. Sediment would be contributed into the system at a high rate as a result of livestock activity. Riparian vegetation would continue to be compromised within these areas.

Effects would be similar to those described for the proposed action, but water quality would improve at a slower rate.

e. Native, T&E, and Locally Important Species (Standard 5)

(1) Fisheries

Fish habitat recovery would continue within the allotment, but would occur at a slower rate than under the proposed action. Continued livestock impacts in the described area would contribute sediment to the water system while continuing to remove riparian vegetation during periods when such use would be detrimental. The end result would be continued degradation of the riparian vegetation.

Effects would be similar to those for the proposed action, except a reduced rate of fish habitat recovery would be expected for Wickiup and Mineral Creeks.

(2) Wildlife

Effects on wildlife would be similar to those described in the proposed action, with the exception of improved riparian habitat condition in the described areas of livestock impacts.

Effects would be the continued improvement of upland and riparian vegetative communities and associated habitats throughout the allotment, with the exception of the riparian vegetation and habitat in the impacted area on Wickiup and Mineral Creeks.

(3) Plants

No Special Status plant communities are known to exist in the Packsaddle Allotment.

2. Other Resources

a. Domestic Livestock Management

Overall allotment objectives, as defined by the Packsaddle Allotment Management Plan, would continue to be achieved, as described in the proposed action. The exception would be a lack of continued progress toward improvement in the public riparian area on Wickiup and Mineral Creeks.

Impacts would be the continued concentration of livestock impacts to the water gap area of the West Pasture and continued pressure on the Wickiup Pasture fence which will eventually result in unauthorized livestock use in the Wickiup Pasture.

Allotment boundary fences would continue to be in poor condition, which would continue to provide opportunities for unauthorized livestock use in the allotment.

b. Cultural Resources

With no spring development, fence construction or fence removal proposed, no impacts to cultural or historic sites would occur.

3. Socioeconomic Effects

The permittee would continue to have an unstable livestock operation from which to generate income under this alternative. Income to the permittee could be disrupted from increased livestock unauthorized use which utilizes forage the permittee would be otherwise entitled. The lack of project development under this alternative would have a negative effect on the local economy by not creating jobs associated with the previous alternatives.

4. Cumulative Effects

Unlike the previous alternatives, there would be no change in the cumulative effects associated with fence removal or construction and no change due to development of the natural springs at the southern edge of the allotment. However, the allotment would continue to have poor riparian habitat associated with Mineral and Wickiup Creeks because they would remain nonfunctional and at-risk.

CHAPTER V: PERSONS, GROUPS, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES CONSULTED

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Silver Creek Ranch, Permittee
U.S. Forest Service, Ochoco National Forest

CHAPTER VI: LIST OF PREPARERS

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Scott Thomas, Archaeologist
Cindy Weston, Fishery Biologist (Fisheries)

CHAPTER VII: MAPS

Map 1 - General Location Map
Map 2 - Proposed Action Alternative Map
Map 3 - Alternative A (Fences Only Alternative) Map
Map 4 - Alternative B (No Action Alternative) Map